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ABSTRACT

Life history interviews with four women holding doctorates in educational administration are presented in this paper, which examines how chances and choice affect women administrators' career decisions. A second focus is on how organizational structure in educational organizations can enhance career opportunities for women educators. Three anecdotes are presented to illustrate the relationships among chance, choice, and opportunities in the careers of particular women in particular organizational contexts. The narratives are categorized according to three themes--unexpected openings, widening horizons, and chance remarks. The stories suggest that women's opportunities can be expanded through the modification of existing structures. A review of current policy initiatives in Canada found that opportunity for females could be engendered through: special assignments; rewarding mentoring functions; redefinition of the concepts of career and success; and affirmative action programs. A recommendation is made to foster environments where chance occurrences can be transformed into opportunities. (29 references) (LMI)

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CHANCE, CHOICE, AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE CAREERS OF FOUR WOMEN EDUCATORS

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Introduction

"Talk about chance!" "It was pure luck that I...." "You cannot predict the future." "The whole thing came together in a way that I didn't expect it to." These were comments made often by the 4 women educators who told me their life stories in my research project studying the careers of some Western Canadian women with doctorates in Educational Administration. Chance, luck, unpredictability in life and career development were demonstrated, and noted, repeatedly in the stories I was told.

In this paper, I discuss 3 significant chances -- and the surrounding choices, constraints, and opportunities -- that were identified by the women in my study. These incidents occurred within within the educational organizations where the women were employed. I also point out how both chance and choice have been and may be constructively promoted or structured within educational organizations to enhance the career opportunities of able women educators.

Definitions of the word "chance" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1961) include expressions such as the "falling out or happening of events." Implicit in the term is an "absence of design," a matter of possibility, not planning. One's attribution to chance is sometimes, but not always, closely related to one's knowledge and perspective. While our definitions of and attributions to chance vary greatly, most of us do admit that chance is a part of

life.

Researchers have generally overlooked the importance of chance elements in careers and in life (Bandura, 1981). Bandura suggests that social scientists have generally been so concerned to uncover patterns with predictive value that aspects of life which interfere with predictability and generalization have been given short shrift. Even those who are dedicated to developing new understandings of career development have, at best, acknowledged briefly the chance aspects (see, for example, Boardman, Harrington, & Horowitz, 1987; Tague & Harris, 1988; Willis & Dodgson, 1986). Nor have those studying women's careers given close attention to the theme of chance, even though women often attribute career achievements to chance, luck, "being in the right place at the right time" (Reynolds, 1988; Willis & Dodgson, 1986).

In her sociological study of women's life choices, Gerson (1985) does document many "unexpected events" (p.20) and equally unexpected consequences (p.192). She demonstrates how some women negotiate their lives, affected by chances while still making choices, and influencing their own circumstances, even while they are being influenced (Gerson, 1985, p.213). Writing about career development, Hall (1986, p.125) suggests that we need research on "trigger events and influences that stimulate various types of [career, job] changes." The frequent silence in the literature when it comes to the matter of chance, coupled with the many

anecdotes related to me that (in the view of the study participants) illustrated chance elements were the catalysts for this paper.

To isolate chance events from choices and opportunities, however, would be an artificial separation. Too much emphasis on chance would portray the women in my study as rather passive recipients of good and bad luck. Chances occur and choices develop as "a series of mini-decisions made over time" (Herr & Cramer, 1984, pp.138-139) within a particular context. Unlike chance, though, choice is grounded in and implies some vision of a universe of options and the power or right to select from among those alternatives. Both chances and choices are themselves structured to varying degrees by our networks, including those related to gender, race, and class, as well as other historical and socio-economic circumstances. I present examples of situations in which women transformed chance into choice and opportunity, adapting to life but constructing their own lives and careers, as well.

The Research Approach

Recently, the life history approach -- of which life-story interviewing is one form -- has gained the attention of scholars interested in documenting and interpreting women's perspectives & experiences (Biklen & Shakeshaft, 1985). Life-story interviewing is a research approach well suited to my own project, which was

an attempt to increase our understanding of "why so few women have become school administrators [and] how it is that this has happened" (Reynolds, 1985, p.46). I was particularly concerned about providing an opportunity for women in Western Canada to give voice to their experiences.

The anecdotes in this paper are excerpts from the biographies that I wrote about the women who participated in my study. I obtained the information for the biographies from the women themselves, through a lengthy series of "life-story" (Bertaux, 1981, p.7) interviews. Following the interviews, I wrote a detailed (about 35 pages) biography of each woman and drafted an accompanying decision-flow chart. Each woman then reviewed her own biography and chart. After the negotiation of some revisions, she agreed that I could treat the final version of the biography as "data" for analysis.

The women in these anecdotes, Lois, Jean, and Elaine are very different individuals, but they share some significant personal characteristics. Demonstrated in their stories, and confirmed by my own impressions from talking with them in person, are the traits of high energy, initiative, adaptability, and willingness to work hard. Other researchers have documented similar characteristics in their studies of "successful" women in the same age and occupational range (see, for example, Boardman et al., 1987, pp.82-83).

Elaine, Lois, and Jean were born (between 1935 and 1945) and raised in white middle-class homes, two in rural western Canada and two on the Canadian eastern seaboard. Two of the three grew up exclusively in farm and small-town settings, while the third lived in both large and small centres. Two are eldest children and two are the second of two children. In common, all four women had mothers who had been school teachers, but none of the four had a father who was a teacher. Two of the mothers were teaching principals in small schools.

All four women have doctorates in Educational Administration and had lived in western Canada for at least 10 years when they related their stories to me. Although their entry dates into postsecondary education ranged from the mid-1950's to the mid-1960's, in all cases teaching was regarded by their families (and usually be themselves) as one of the few acceptable paid-work options for young women. By the time they completed their doctoral studies during the late 1970's and early-to-mid 1980's, one of the women was in her mid-thirties and two were in their mid-forties.

At the time I interviewed them, two women were in their early 40's and two in their late 40's. All four were married, each to the same man for at least 10 years. Only one woman had been married twice. Two of the women's husbands were classroom teachers, one was an educational administrator, and the fourth was an accountant. All four women had children, giving birth

variously in their teens, their twenties, their thirties. All four couples were living in urban settings, with populations ranging from 50,000 to 500,000.

The women in my study are not radicals. They were raised and have been inclined to live and work within established white middle-class organizational structures. They have maintained a strong student/classroom orientation striving for curriculum and instruction improvements through modifications to existing practices (Greefield & Beam, 1980). They have demonstrated resourcefulness in coping with the status quo (Woo, 1985, p.287), being neither entirely defeated nor entirely coopted by conventional expectations. They are white middle-class women who have performed competently within the system and sometimes, but not always, received the conventional recognition awarded to such people. They have succeeded in living out worthwhile careers within contemporary organizational and societal constraints, some of which place special burdens on women. The accomplishments of these women, and others like them, are genuine. Their voices deserve to be heard.

The Anecdotes

The anecdotes in this paper (only 3 of the 70 that I've drawn from the biographies) illustrate the complex relations between chance, choice, and opportunity in the careers of particular women in particular organizational contexts. The chance elements

represent the "kinds of serendipity" (Boardman, Harrington, & Horowitz, 1987, p.68) that mark significant changes in careers and career aspirations. These anecdotes represent only a sampling of the many occurrences in their personal and professional lives that the women in this study attributed to chance.

I have categorized the following anecdotes as illustrating three themes. While recognizing that such categorization is contrived, it does highlight what the women saw as the significant chance aspects of the anecdote. "Unexpected Openings" provides an example of a desirable job that became vacant and available to the woman in a way and at a time that seemed quite unpredictable to her. The anecdote in "Widening Horizons" describes the expansion of an instructional role to include administrative responsibilities, thus fostering professional growth and new aspirations. The section on "Chance Remarks" shows the impact of a passing or chance (as defined by the woman) comment that was a catalyst for making choices.

These anecdotes illustrate Kanter's notion of "opportunity" as a job posting that "offers new potential for growth and learning rather than only a change in status or span of authority" (1977, p.272). In my comments following the presentation of an anecdote, I sketch the structure of opportunity in which the chance event was embedded.

UNEXPECTED OPENINGS

Jean Becomes A Program Head

Jean

30 years old
3 years experience as a classroom teacher
    1 year in this same town, different school
    1 year in the same geographical area
    1 year in a large, urban school
Consistent involvement in teachers' union/professional development activities, local and provincial
Over 15 years experience as an office worker and manager
Teaching Certificate
Some courses (summer sessions) toward B.Ed.
Married
Mother of 4 children, ages 5-12 years

The Context

Late 1960's-early 1970's
A booming town of 15000 in Western Canada
New composite high school,
    the amalgamation of the academic and vocational high schools;
    1200 students, 35 teachers
    the school had high visibility in the community

The Story

Jean and her husband, Jim, returned somewhat reluctantly to a town which they believed they had left permanently one year before, when Jim embarked on a study leave. It proved, however, to be an exciting time to return. A new composite high school was being opened. Jean and Jim were both hired as staff members. Jean quickly became involved in her school's governance. Her principal, a "go-getter" in a highly visible new

school, had progressive ideas about school leadership; he was keen on community involvement and participatory planning. Jean became a member of various policy work groups that he established. Often, she ended up chairing them. In that role, she carried the group recommendations up to the next level of decision makers and defended the ideas.

Within a few months, she was appointed a program head. Part way through the year, the long-time female program head in Jean's department decided to retire from the post. The incumbent thought highly of Jean and apparently recommended Jean as a successor to the position. The principal offered Jean the job. There was no formal selection process. Jean simply accepted the appointment, in her fourth year as a teacher and her first in that school. The opportunity was a welcome "ego boost" for Jean.

As program head, Jean concerned herself with handling the administrative details that supported her teachers' classroom activities and sorting out any conflicts the teachers had with their students. Initially, she involved other people in her decision making because she herself had liked being consulted, and "because of my own insecurities." She was also influenced by the human relations-oriented course work in Educational Psychology the her husband was taking. Over time, though, she persisted with a participatory management approach because it worked.

The second year as a program head, she spearheaded an internal evaluation of her own program. The evaluation was one dimension of an overall school evaluation -- a new initiative by the province. Jean acquired confidence as a program head because of her role in the evaluation project and also because she received positive feedback from the external evaluators about her program.

In her capacity as program head, Jean was also part of the pincipal's senior management group. Because the administrative team was very student oriented, Jean's own commitment to students was reinforced. But, as part of the administrative team, she gradually adopted the perspective of the administrator, rather than the teacher. She found that she "liked knowing more about what was happening in the school."

Comments

From her own point of view, Jean's move to program head was unexpected, unsought, and rapid. In general, one might predict that joining the staff of a new high school in a booming town would provide an environment of opportunity, particularly when the school is under the leadership of an energetic principal, committed to widespread participation. Nonetheless, Jean's and Jim's return to that town just as the school opened was not predictable, nor was the availability of an appointment as

program head.

That was the setting. Enter Jean, already recognized for her innovative "hands-on" teaching approaches to her applied vocational subjects. As well, wherever she lived and taught, she was active in her teachers' union local, and her provincial specialists' council. Even within that year -- and this was characteristic of her career -- she had taken on committee work, often chairing groups at least partly because she was willing to do the work. As a chair, she achieved early visibility within the school and the community. And, at thirty, she may have been relatively new to teaching but she had brought into the profession a substantial amount of life experience, and some self-confidence, from the business world and child rearing. Finally, Jean exhibited a style rooted in "connectedness" (Gilligan, 1982) to other people. By her own description, that style became characteristic of her as an administrator.

Now, it so happened that the incumbent program head did not like administering the enlarged department that had resulted from the amalgamation of the town's two secondary schools. Was Jean the only obvious candidate for sucessor? Or the catalyst for the retirement decision? Had she "declared herself" by her ready and visible involvement in her profession? Was she, the newcomer, a "neutral" appointment? Did anyone else want the job, which did not entail additional financial compensation and was not formally designated as "administration"? Jean did not elaborate these

points. They were not issues for her at the time.

It should be noted, though, that Jean was the beneficiary of an informal selection process in a small-town high school administered by a male principal, 20 years ago. As a new woman in that context, albeit in a department with several women staff members, Jean was an unlikely beneficiary. One would expect, from the research, that such informal processes would have worked to the benefit of male staff members. Perhaps it is relevant that Jean's husband, a colleague on staff, was a valued member of the principal's inner circle although he was not an administrator. Perhaps the retiring program head together with the principal simply did what administrators should do, and chose the best person for that job in that school. Speculation aside, Jean did not agonize over whether or not to become the program head. The offer was a welcome one.

WIDENING HORIZONS

Elaine Becomes A Project Administrator

Elaine

31 years of age
4 years' experience as an instructor in the college
Active in faculty association,and college governance;
and in course, program and facility development
2 years' experience as an elementary school teacher
About 3 years' experience in secretarial work and
in post-secondary instruction elsewhere
B.Ed., B.A., M.A., some courses in ed. admin.
Married
No children

The Context

Mid-late 1970's
A large and growing Western Canadian city
A young and growing post-secondary institution
The college's President emphasized collegial decision making and fostered a sense of community
All faculty were relative new-comers
Many new staff were hired & oriented when Elaine was.
Elaine's divisional colleagues dominated college politics.
Post-secondary education was well funded

The Story

After working four years as as instructor within one post-secondary institution, a new role was created and became available to Elaine. It was not a promotion, in the sense of being a move up the official hierarchy. However, it was an administrative position with interesting new challenges.

When the head of Elaine's division proposed that a summer session be introduced at their institution, Elaine immediately recognized the potential of such a project. Given entering students' academic needs in relation to the requirements of many programs, such a project seemed timely and appropriate to Elaine. She became the coordinator and manager of the project automatically -- none of her colleagues was even interested in the role.

Elaine had several reasons for agreeing to cordinate a new summer school project. She was well established as an instructor and also very involved in her organization's governance through committee activities. She had recently been responsible for

developing new instructional facilities for her program. Thus, she had already exercised most of the "job enrichment" options that were available to her. Over the years, she had become more and more concerned about the academic standards at her institution. So, offering some basic courses during the summer might prepare students better for their required course work in the fall. Besides, Elaine felt strongly that the College and its faculty were under-utilized; the place was only operating about 8 months out of every 12. Even the universities did better than that, with their spring and summer sessions. Without expecting or receving any extra money for the work involved, Elaine became the project administrator and its evaluator.

The first year, Elaine had complete responsibility for the program. She "seemed to collect a wonderful staff" of dedicated and competent teachers. Her selections were somewhat intuitive; she did not give primacy to formal qualifications. She set up teaching goals and a personnel evaluation system that included peer evaluation. The staff also evaluated her performance as the project administrator. Her style was "very much to be evident and around as a leader." As a result, she feels that she got excellent work from her staff.

The summer schools proved to be very popular with the students. Approximately 300 people attended each year of the three years that Elaine was involved as coordinator/manager. Although the program has undergone many changes over time, it was

still being offered ten years after Elaine initiated it. Meanwhile, although Elaine's formal role designation remained that of an instructor, her project administration experience meant that she was viewing the world more and more from the perspective of an administrator.

Comments

Elaine arrived at the college in a period filled with opportunities. She accepted some of the opportunities that were presented to her, and created others. The collegial environment and generous funding of the time enabled her to "branch out" from the classroom, although formally she remained a classroom instructor. She demonstrated her professional commitment and competence in a variety of ways. And, like Jean, she enjoyed the "connectedness" of a people-oriented, participatory organizational milieu.

When the invitation to coordinate the summer session came along, it was a surprise to Elaine, but a welcome one. She was already in the habit of seeking new challenges, being given opportunities, and experiencing satisfaction from her accomplishments. Her interest in planning policy-making had been developing as she gradually assumed various voluntary leadership roles within the college governance structure. But, she had already exercised most of the obvious options available even in

expansionary times.

She did have one uncomfortable stint in administration -- as the faculty association president. She was catapulted into the presidency during her training year as vice-president. She felt unready to assume the presidency and did not enjoy her tenure in the job. Nonetheless, when the administrative position related to summer session was offered to her, she accepted with alacrity. Apparently the one unhappy experience as faculty association president had not soured her altogether on administration. Certainly, the fact that she was doing some Ed. Admin. courses at the time indicates her interest in some aspects of admin, at least. And, the courses were relevant preparation for the work related to the summer session project.

Elaine's appointment as summer session coordinator/manager was not the result of a formal selection process. Presumably, Elaine's male superordinate recognized Elaine's capabilities and readiness to assume such responsibility, based on her commitment and achievements to that point. When asked about the appointment process, Elaine commented to me that she received no additional compensation for being the project administrator, she worked through what would have been her holiday time, and no one else was interested in taking on the role. Elaine was, in effect, recruited as a volunteer. But a willing one, at least for the first couple of years.

There is a sequel to this story. In spite of her administrative/leadership experience and inclinations, Elaine did not receive a formal administrative appointment at that college. Indeed, she applied for an appointment as department chair and a male colleague was given the job. In her view, supported by comments from other colleagues, Elaine was much better qualified for the position than her less experienced and less well prepared competitor. Elaine was not pleased by the prospect of working for her former peer. Because there was no other route into administration, Elaine started to explore the options elsewhere.

There were a great many chance occurrences in Elaine's personal and professional life that led to her arrival at this college. There were a great many leadership (but not formal administrative) opportunities at the college in her first few years there. Those opportunities resulted from an organizational structure and practices that were founded on the values of collegiality and participatory decision making; the youth and relatively small size of the institution; the pro-postsecondary education climate in that province at the time; and Elaine's own professional dedication and initiative. It is not mere chance, however, that Elaine ultimately left the organization. That environment no longer offered her appealing opportunities.

CHANCE REMARKS

Lois Becomes A School Prinicpal

Lois

36 years old
15 years experience as a classroom teacher
and consultant in one school system
Had been fairly outspoken within the
system over the years regarding education
matters that were important to her
M.Ed. (Curriculum & Instruction)
Courses toward a post-graduate Diploma
in Educational Administration
Married
Mother of 3 children, ages 11-16 years

The Context

Early 1970's
A medium-sized city, for Western Canada
A small but growing urban school system, the
product of the recent amalgamation of two systems
The Superintendent had an established history
of taking an interest in his teaching/consultant
staff; had supported and encouraged Lois'
endeavours on many occasions

The Story

One comment from a senior administrator was the catalyst for Lois' decision to apply for a school principalship. Lois was a consultant then, attending a regular meeting of central office staff, which included all the senior administrators and the consultants. The Superintendent announced the new appointments to principalships. None were women. Lois, feeling "way out of line," said "Wouldn't it have been nice if some women had been appointed?" Lois does not remember the Superintendent's reply,

although he was certainly polite. She does remember that she hurried out of the building right after the meeting. One of the Assistant Superintendents followed her and said "Why don't you put your money where your mouth is? When was the last time you applied for a principalship?" Lois responded that it had not occurred to her that she was qualified or suited to administration -- it was, after all, very much a male-dominated field. But, Lois began to think seriously about the possibility of entering it.

Lois had been a consultant for some time. Initially, she was offered a job as a secondary reading consultant, but in each of her subsequent years as a consultant, her responsibilities differed in scope. It was a period that afforded her opportunities to do many different things. In addition to "marketing" on a one-to-one basis the improved teaching of reading in the schools she visited, she gave workshops. The topics diversified over the years as she saw and responded to teachers' needs.

Lois' superordinates in the school system "stretched" her by giving her new opportunities and supported her by believing in her capabilities. She participated for the first time in a provincial curriculum project. As well, she pulled together a group of teachers, who worked Fridays and many weekends on a system-wide curriculum project. Lois was able to apply much of what she had learned on the provincial curriculum committee to

the organization of the local handbook project.

Lois also established or cemented certain important professional relations during that period. She mentions as supportive colleagues both her male superordinates and a set of women teachers, consultants, and school administrators. One woman, a principal about ten years her senior, was widely respected and very popular. She was a major influence on Lois, serving as Lois' professional role model.

However, Lois was feeling that her years as a consultant were "a marvellous growing period but that was enough." So, once the suggestion had been made, it occurred to Lois that being a principal might be interesting and, moreover, that perhaps it was a job she could do. It was time for a new challenge.

Lois weighed the possibility of applying for a principalship. There were not many women principals in her system, perhaps three women of about forty principals in the elementary schools. And a move from consultant to principal, by-passing a vice-principalship, would be unusual in that system. On the other hand, Lois now had "some very strong feelings about what I wanted to see done in schools and how I felt teachers should teach." She was ready to follow through on her convictions in one school, rather than "wandering around as a consultant." Lois had seen and admired what a capable and committed principal could accomplish in a school. Lois concluded that she was going to

apply for a principalship herself.

In preparation for that, she took certain actions. She enrolled in her first course in educational administration. Later, she decided to work toward a post-graduate Diploma in Ed. Admin, although she already had a Master's degree in curriculum. Meanwhile, she made other preparations related to her application. Prior to being interviewed she approached several colleagues whom she respected. She asked each of them to discuss with her the kinds of issues and questions that a selection committee might raise. This process of gathering other opinions in order to clarify her own views became a pattern in Lois' future applications and in her administrative style generally. At thirty-six years old, Lois was interviewed and offered a principalship. She accepted.

Comments

At a time more recent than the early 1970's, the exchange between Lois and her superordinates would hardly qualify as "Chance Remarks." However, in that era and geographical location, such an exchange was not planned or even predictable. Lois had spoken out more than once on curriculum matters. Her comment at the central office staff meeting, though, addressed a different sort of issue -- the role of women in her school system -- and a different audience -- the collected senior administrators of her

school system, all male. Her comment was, to her ears, unexpected and daring.

Yet, it triggered a challenging and encouraging response from one of the men. If Lois had not already been comfortable and well established in that milieu, it is unlikely that she would have made the remark she did. It is unlikely, as well, that a superordinate would have responded as he did. His response would now be regarded as a trite rejoinder to concerns about the under-representation of women in administration: "Women don't want those jobs, they don't apply." However, when this incident occurred, such simplistic answers were more excusable. Lois articulated the standard response of that time: "I'm not qualified, I can't do the job. Men administer and women teach."

The environment of opportunity in which Lois had been living out her professional life has been described in the anecdote. That such an organization allowed Lois to acquire a substantial range and depth of professional experience (through both full time and part time employment) is obvious. That her high visibility role as a consultant was an advantage -- provided she performed well according to that system's standards -- seems equally obvious. That her extensive network provided valuable support and stimulation is clear. Lois, like the other women in this study, flourished in a situation of "connectness" with other people (Gilligan, 1982). Even so, consultants in many school systems that size would never have had so much regular, direct

access to senior administrators. And Lois emphasized to me the sponsorship she received from male superordinates in the system.

In spite of all that, Lois' administrative ambitions were slow to crystallize. Even in that "nurturing environment" (her words), self-confidence and female role models were scarce. It took a challenge, issued with a belief in her capabilities, to trigger her aspiration to become a principal. Or did the exchange "give permission" to Lois' existing, but unarticulated aspiration? Only after the exchange did Lois seriously assess the possibilities and acknowledge that she had a vision of educational leadership for a school. Being a consultant, rather than being a vice-principal, was her professional training ground for the principalship.

Her family life was an unarticulated dimension of Lois' initially startled response to her super-ordinate's challenge. Her non-school life was busy and complex, filled with people. Her community involvement, together with her husband's, related to their children and their church. They attended recitals and sporting events. Lois sewed costumes and provided transportation. The family skiied and built a lake cottage. Lois took night courses and played bridge. Is it merely chance that Lois raised the question of female administrators only when her own children were becoming more independent? In that respect, Lois' late entry to administration represents one positive form of accommodation to the problem of combining family

and professional responsibilities.

And yes, Lois was appointed to a principalship the first time she applied. But look at the personal and professional experience she had accumulated by then. She brought it all with her into the role of school administrator.

Lessons from the Anecdotes

What lessons do the stories in this paper hold for us? The anecdotes have implications for organizational structures and practices, as well as for individual women. Even as we enter the 1990's, men's career paths in education continue to lead to administration more often than do women's (Statistics Canada, 1989, p.196). The statistics suggest that women do not yet have the same range of career options within school organizations that men have traditionally enjoyed. What can be done to extend that range? Based on the experiences voiced by Lois, Jean, and Elaine in the preceding pages -- experiences that occurred as much as 20 years ago, in the late 1960's and 1970's -- it is possible to foster environments where chance occurrences may be turned into opportunities.

Writing in 1977, Kanter asserted that a great deal could be accomlished simply through "the systematic application of much of what is already known" (p.267). That is, we could make our

existing organizational structures and practices more equitable, and our paid-work contexts more humane. At the same time, human energy and talents would be released for the benefit of the organization as well as the individual.

The stories told by Lois, Jean, and Elaine, although they occur before the publication of her book, illustrate a number of Kanter's recommendations. Lest that be interpreted as a cause for complacency, or an argument in defense of the status quo, let me point out that the "systematic application" of those practices would almost certainly have increased the number of women entering administration, years ago. The key word is "systematic." Tribute should be paid, however, to those individuals (and they were mostly men) who worked to provide positive, opportunity-filled environments long before we used terms and discussed policies such as "affirmative action."

I conclude this paper by reviewing certain organizational structures and practices -- including some current policy initiatives in Canadian school systems -- that foster choice and chance. These initiatives offer diverse opportunities for able women educators to recognize, develop, and demonstrate their talents and abilities with respect to educational leadership and administration.

....Chance favours only the mind that is prepared.
(Louis Pasteur)

In careers, as in life, choice and chance are interwoven. While chance is a continuing element in the living out of a career, it need not be a controlling factor. The readiness to recognize and capitalize on opportunities when they appear is a potent resource (Edson, 1988, p.259; Greenfield & Beam, 1980, p.49; Paddock, 1981, p.195). Flexibility, insight, resilience (Hall, 1986, p.26) and a willingness to take risks are more important aids than 10-year plans. Individuals -- and organizations -- must be able to adjust to changing, frequently unpredictable realities. We could do more to acknowledge chance as a factor in career development and to document the ways that individuals have coped with and benefitted from chance events.

"Without interfering with the chance processes themselves it is possible to use them deliberately by providing a suitable setting in which they may take place, and then harvesting the results of the chance interactions."
Edward de Bono (1971, p.94)

The literature contains many suggestions for organizational practices that would systematically promote and structure both chance and choice. Such practices would offer diverse --and equitably distributed -- opportunities for individuals to develop and demonstrate their talents and abilities (Gaertner, 1981, p.214). From this array of possible and actual initiatives, certain ones are especially pertinent to the anecdotes and theme

of this paper.[1]

Special assignments, such as Elaine's appointment as summer session administrator, and "bridging" appointments (Kanter, 1977, p.271; Shakeshaft, 1987, p.139), such as Jean's role as program head are obvious examples. Boundary-spanning roles, such as Lois' position as a consultant, that enable individuals to encounter new groups are particularly helpful (Wheatley, 1981, p.269). The task force (and, sometimes, the committee) is one of the most frequently cited opportunities (Kanter, 1977, p.272). To be effective in education, though, task forces should be designed to cut across various levels of the bureaucratic-administrative structure and also to bridge the isolation of individuals in the professional-teaching structure (Wheatley, 1981, p.259). This approach, and the importance of attending inservice training and conferences, is illustrated in all three anecdotes. One Ontario school board has reported that it "ensured female participation in management initiatives and special assignments". Another board has secured the "vocal and visible support" of its senior administrators for a program of affirmative action. In effect, such structures and practices provide the opportunity for individuals to exercise educational

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1. The policy and program examples that follow are drawn from these two sources: Especially for Women: Programs and Services Offered by School Boards, published by the Canadian Education Association in 1988; and The Status of Women and Affirmative Action/Employment Equity in Ontario School Boards: Report to the Legislature by the Minister of Education, 1988.

leadership whether or not they carry the label of administrator.

More could be done to systematically identify reward the individuals and groups within the organization who naturally fulfill mentor functions (Kram, 1986, p.196), wherever those activities provide equitable opportunities. Principals and other front-line administrators should be made aware of their key role in recruiting & developing potential administrators (Warren, 1989). Several Ontario boards report the creation of employee exchanges and of "job shadowing" programs. The latter may be aimed particularly at giving women teachers who aspire to "positions of added responsibility" the opportunity to observe and converse with administrators-in-action. Mentoring takes many forms, as illustrated in the experiences of the women I studied, but it does exist. Giving formal recognition to the mentoring that does go on, while creating opportunities for mentoring to develop naturally, would institutionalize different -- and highly appropriate -- values in our educational organizations (Fullan et al, 1987, p.229. To recognize in concrete ways those who act as mentors is to reinforce the significance of values such as generosity, collaboration, and "connectedness," which are and always have been demonstrated but too rarely valued in organizational reward systems.

All these initiatives are more possible and more likely to be effective when organizations/work units are relatively small (Kanter, 1977, pp.285-286). Decentralization is one remedy, for

which there are precedents in education. Economies of scale may be achieved at a substantial cost to individuals and organizations. Implementing the practices just described would also change an organization's governance structure (Kanter, 1977, p.257, p.285; Jovick, 1981, p.166). Power would inevitably be shared more equally; cooperation would be necessary for survival.

As well, the anecdotes I have related imply the need for a more radical conceptual and practical re-orientation that might encourage wider options for both women and men in the future. At a general level, we should be working to revise substantially our notion of what constitutes a "career". A career might be defined as a series of paid-work opportunities to apply what one has learned (from previous paid work, family, community, and leisure activities) in the past (Young, 1989, p.215). "Success" then depends on access to interesting new opportunities that are not necessarily associated with upward mobility (Kanter, 1977, p.272).

Professional work could be redesigned to accommodate other dimensions and demands of life, especially as they relate to family and leisure. For example, the teaching day and year might be regarded as an enlightened norm because it permits the possibility of balancing professional and personal/family responsibilities. Seeking such a balance should not be regarded as an absence of true professional commitment (Biklen, 1987).

And, priorities vary with the individual and throughout life. Organizational options could better accommodate these varying priorities. "Fast track" norms for the achievement of certain positions by certain ages should be scrutinized. Later entry into administration, for example, is another way to reduce the concurrent pressures of paid and family work to more sequential roles (Kanter, 1977; Levinson, 1978, pp.337-338). Moreover, career interruptions for family work could be recognized as good preparation for administrative work (Paddock, 1981, p.194). Many of the skills acquired, such as juggling competing demands, negotiating, and nurturing are transferrable and important to educational administration (Fullan et al., 1987, p.229).

Affirmative action/employment equity programs often include a monitoring function with regard not only to statistics but also with regard to various organizational policies and procedures. This monitoring may and certainly could be an effective way of seeing past the formal policy and the offical rhetoric into the organizational "backrooms" where "chances" not only occur but may sometimes be structured to favour some individuals over others. Such monitoring makes it possible to examine and change the definitions -- and the values underlying those definitions -- of competence, preparation, suitability, career, and success. For it is the definitions and values, explicit or implicit, which influence significantly the design and description of administrative work, as well as the selection and promotion of

candidates for it.

Let us be heartened by any positive practices in our collective past and by the sometimes positive experiences of women such as the ones who participated in my study. The anecdotes I have related here are far from being the "whole stories" told by the study participants. And, their stories are far from being the only stories that could and should be told. Nonetheless, let us recognize and reinforce the people and practices that have created and do create opportunities for women, as well as men. Let us recognize the accomplishments of women who have fashioned opportunity from chance. Let us talk more about chance, together with choice and opportunity.

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